A Review of Services to Voluntary Carers in South Staffordshire

Health Scrutiny Panel
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Chairman’s Foreword

South Staffordshire is a predominantly rural district, with 80% classified as Green Belt. However, although the area is unquestionably picturesque, its rural nature bring unique challenges. South Staffordshire has an ageing population; ageing faster than any other area in the Country. Inevitably, therefore, there are people for whom reliance on a friend or family member to support their daily well-being is necessary. For some carers, it is not their full-time role; they may already be balancing existing work and family commitments, but they help others through a sense of moral and social duty.

Carers are difficult to identify. How is a carer defined? At what point does someone become a ‘carer’ as distinct from simply assisting a family member or friend in their life?

As Councillors, we feel it is appropriate for us to ensure we best represent those people marginalised through their own humanity and compassion. Caring for someone may, at times, feel like an isolated role and we need to ensure that these carers have access to as much support and assistance as possible.

The topic of Voluntary Carers was approved as part of the Scrutiny work programme and undertaken by the Health Scrutiny Panel.

Janet Johnson
Cllr Mrs. Janet Johnson
Chairman of the Health Scrutiny Panel
1. **Methodology**

1.1 The review was conducted by members of the Health Scrutiny Panel at South Staffordshire Council.

1.2 Members received presentations from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and from the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP).

1.3 Members received a debating paper which detailed the legislative framework around carers and regional and national strategies aimed to provide guidance and support for those in a caring role.

1.4 Conclusions were formed through debate following the evidence gathering process detailed above.
2. **Recommendations and Action Plan**

2.1 The South Staffordshire Review should also be utilised to promote available services and assistance to voluntary carers in South Staffordshire.

2.2 South Staffordshire Council’s website should actively promote the role of carers in the area to raise awareness and provide appropriate signposting to available external resources.

2.3 South Staffordshire Council should continue to participate in and actively promote it’s involvement in Carers Week.

2.4 To ensure delivery of the Multi-Agency Strategy for Carers 2008-2011 and to aid the organisations looking to provide support to carers, the Health Scrutiny Panel wish to receive updates against the agreed actions contained within the strategy every 6 months from a representative on the Carers Programme Board.

2.5 South Staffordshire Council should ask the Princess Royal Trust and CASS to make young carers aware of the SUSSED and HYPE activities run by the Council, to support the social development of young carers. The Council should also explore the feasibility of offering a reduced cost to those young carers, identified by these organisations.

2.6 That a review of the Intergenerational project, delivered in Blymhill and Weston Under Lizard & Wheaton Aston, with a particular focus on the feasibility around establishing an electronic communication network for isolated carers in Locality 2, is undertaken in a years’ time.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Cross Reference Number</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Chief Executive</td>
<td>6 months after adoption by the Executive</td>
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<td>2.2</td>
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<td>Chairman of the Health Scrutiny Panel</td>
<td>Head of Governance and Scrutiny Services</td>
<td>To be included in the work programme in 12 months time from adoption</td>
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3. **A Review of Services to Voluntary Carers in South Staffordshire**

3.1 The topic of the Services to Voluntary Carers was suggested as part of a consultation exercise with officers and members to identify Scrutiny topics for review. The review topic forms part of the scrutiny work programme, approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

3.2 The Health Scrutiny Panel comprises;

- Cllr Mrs.J.A.Johnson (Chairman)
- Cllr Mrs.P.A.Griffin (Vice-Chairman)
- Cllr Mrs.K.A.Williams
- Cllr Mrs.M.Bond
- Cllr Mrs.J.M.Burton
- Cllr D.J.Clifft
- Cllr B.J.W.Cox
- Cllr Mrs.I.G.A.Ford
- Cllr M.R.Hampson
- Cllr Mrs.B.Heath
- Cllr Mrs.S.M.Oatley
- Cllr R.J.Perry
- Cllr Mrs.E.D.Ray
- County Councillor Mrs.K.M.Perry

3.2 The terms of reference were agreed at the first meeting. These were:

3.2.1 To establish the services that are available to carers in South Staffordshire and the responsible service providers

3.2.2 To examine how carers are made aware of the services and benefits that are available to them.

3.2.3 To examine how access to services is maintained in remote rural areas.

3.2.4 To explore ways South Staffordshire Council can best influence the organisations providing services to carers.

3.2.5 To investigate how South Staffordshire Council can support Carers in the district.

4. **South Staffordshire in Context**

4.1 South Staffordshire is a predominantly rural area with a population of just over 105,000. Over 80% of the district is Green Belt.

4.2 The average wage of workers in the district is lower than the national average\(^1\), which suggests that with average house prices being roughly 10% higher in the district than the national average, the economic migration out of the district is greater than the economic migration into the district.

4.3 The age demographic of people living in South Staffordshire shows that there are significantly more older people living in the district than the national average.

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\(^1\) http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/52F4F086-9E46-46128AAE08C11217CC1/40948/SouthStaffordshireProfile.pdf
4.4 There is however low unemployment. Only 1.4% of South Staffordshire residents are unemployed, compared to a national average of around 2.4%.

5. **Definition of Carers**

5.1 The Carers (Recognition & Services) Act 1995 defines a carer as someone who provides or intends to provide a substantial amount of care on a regular basis. The person cared for can be a friend, relative or neighbour who needs support due to sickness, age or disability. The carers talked about in this paper do not include professional care workers, volunteers on behalf of voluntary organisations or carers employed by a disabled person.

5.2 There is no definition of “regular and substantial care” and it is considered differently depending on the organisation and the purpose. Staffordshire County Council indicate that significant and regular care is approximately 20 hours per week for the purposes of offering Carers Assessments. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), for the purpose of issuing Carers Allowance defines significant care as 35 hours per week. Whereas the Carers Association South Staffordshire will offer services to carers that require them regardless of the amount of time they spend caring.

5.3 Carers at the Heart of the 21st Century, the Government’s national strategy for carers, published in June 2008 promises to rectify this by establishing a standard definition of a carer for use by all government bodies. The strategy’s draft definition is “A carer spends a significant proportion of their life providing unpaid support to family or potentially friends. This could be caring for a relative, partner or friend who is ill, frail, disabled or has mental health or substance misuse problems”. However this definition still needs to be evaluated to ensure it can be adopted across government and even then there will be different trigger points for different agencies and benefits.

5.4 As demonstrated above a single definition of a carer is difficult to achieve and can be very confusing for the people providing voluntary care. It makes it difficult for professionals to identify the benefits that are available to individual carers and even harder for the carers themselves to know what help they are eligible to claim.

5.5 It is estimated that in the UK, 1 in 8 adults are a carer and every year, another two million take on caring responsibilities. Furthermore, 1.5 million carers are over 60. Many give up work, income or spend savings on caring for another, which in turn may lead to financial difficulties for themselves.

6. **Legal Context**

6.1 There are three main areas of legislation regarding Voluntary Carers.

- The Carers (Recognition & Services) Act 1995 gave carers important new rights and a clear legal status. Under the act, individuals who provide or intend to provide a substantial amount of care on a regular basis are entitled to request (at the time the person they care for is being assessed for community care services), an assessment of their ability to care and to

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3 http://www.carersweek.org/help_page.asp?id=52
continue caring. Local authorities are required to take into account the results of that assessment in making decisions about the type and level of community care services to be provided to the person receiving care. The assessment under the 1995 Act is of the carer’s ability to provide care and of his or her ability to sustain the care that he or she has been providing. The 1995 Act applies to carers of all ages.

- The Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000, introduced in April 2001, extended the carers right to an assessment. It placed mandatory duties on local authorities to support carers by providing services to carers directly. It gave carers the right to an assessment independent of the person they care for. It empowered authorities to provide direct payments to carers and allowed authorities to introduce flexibility to provision of short breaks through the Short Break Voucher Scheme.

- The Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act 2004 is the latest legislation. It places a duty on councils to inform carers, in certain circumstances, about their right to an assessment of their needs. It provides that when assessing the carers needs, the authority must take into account whether the carer works or wants to work, is undertaking or wishing to undertake education or training and the carers leisure activities. The act also facilitates co-operation between authorities (i.e. Local Council and PCT) to provide for the needs of the carer.

7. **Carers Allowance**

7.1 The main Benefit available to carers is the Carers Allowance, in isolation it is a relatively simple benefit but it can affect other benefits which makes it a little more difficult to understand.

7.2 Carers Allowance is available to carers over the age of 16, the benefit is administered by the DWP so people can get information and apply for the benefit through the Pensions Service (over 60’s) or at the local Jobcentre (16 – 59 year olds).

7.3 To be eligible, the carer must be caring for someone who is in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (at the middle or higher rate) or Attendance Allowance, they must be caring for 35 hours or more and earn less than £95 per week. Carers Allowance is currently £50.55 per week with an extra £30 per week available for Carers with dependants.

7.4 The time spent caring can include times where the claimant is not actively caring, for example, sleeping at the cared for persons house in case of emergency would count toward the 35 hours needed to be eligible.

7.5 If the carer is claiming state pension they are not eligible to claim Carers Allowance as well, but there is some overlapping benefit in that if the person’s pension is low Carers Allowance can top up the value to match the weekly amount the person would receive from in the form of Carers Allowance (currently £50.55).

7.6 If a Carer is in receipt of a means tested benefits such as Income Support, Council Tax Benefit or Pension Credit which Carers Allowance cannot be paid alongside, it may still be worth making a claim. The DWP will acknowledge the carer’s underlying right to the benefit, and raise the
income threshold by £27.75 and the claimant will be entitled to extra money per week.

7.7 Carers must discuss their application for Carers Allowance with the person they care for it can reduce the benefits they can claim. If the cared for person lives on their own and is in receipt of Attendance Allowance they receive a premium of £50 per week, but if someone claims carers allowance for looking after them, they are no longer eligible for the premium.

7.8 Carers allowance is non-means tested so does not take into account savings and investments, but it is earnings related and is not available if the carer is earning over £95 per week (£380 per month). Carers Allowance is £50.55 per week and to be eligible the carer must be over 16 and spending over 35 hours per week caring for someone in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Attendance Allowance or Constant Attendance Allowance.

7.9 If a carer whose earnings are over the £95 per week threshold applies for the carers allowance they will not receive the monetary benefit of the allowance. However, it can still be worth the carer applying as carers allowance can yield other benefits, in particular it can enhance some means tested benefits such as Income Support and Council Tax Benefit. It also gives the person an official carer status and can help them access concessionary discounts on things like travel.

8. Carers’ Views

8.1 In order to inform the latest National Carers Strategy the Government undertook a consultation exercise to understand what would make the biggest difference to carers’ lives both as a carer and outside of their caring role. The consultation also researched young carers to find out what could be done so that young carers do have to provide care or can reduce their caring responsibility in order to be able to enjoy more of their childhood.

8.2 The consultation highlighted a number of improvements to services that adult carers would like to see. The main improvements called for are:

- Increased emotional support for carers
- Improved flexibility of respite care
- Better access to information on the services and support available.
- Faster delivery of service and support following assessment
- Standardisation of support across all areas and authorities to eliminate the perceived post code lottery

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• More consistency of services, i.e. having an allocated social worker to reduce stress for the cared for person.

• Reduction of bureaucracy and simplification of processes for information sharing between agencies.

• Improved carers allowance and removal of its means testing

• The opportunity to work to improve their financial situation and gain the social and emotional benefits of working.

• More recognition of the role carers play. Carers want to be valued by health professionals, the general public and employers.

8.3 The carers consulted during the exercise described the effects that caring has on their wellbeing. Many carers talked openly about the stress and depression they can suffer trying to balance caring responsibilities and their normal lives. Many of them also talk about feelings of isolation, loneliness and constant worry. A number of the carers experienced strain on their relationships with partners and family members. Some carers felt that unhealthy addictions such as alcohol were due in part to their caring roles. Carers also reported physical consequences of their caring role including back and neck injuries from lifting, stress related illness such as shingles, psoriasis, and eczema.

8.4 Carers have found that there is a general lack of recognition of a carers’ role amongst the public, health and social care professionals, GP’s and employers. Carers want to feel more valued by society for the work they do as a carer, they want health professionals to recognise their expertise on the person they care for and the issues they face and they want employers to take a more flexible approach to employing and retaining carers.

8.5 Carers can often have to repeat the same information about the person they care for over and over to different health services. Some carers keep journals on their cared for person’s history and are then frustrated when health professionals do not have time to read it and ask them to repeat the information again. Carers can often find it difficult to arrange appointments with health and other services due to fluctuations in the cared for person’s condition, there is a lack of flexibility and little recognition of the problems faced by the carers in attending appointments.

8.6 A message that is often communicated by carers is a lack of information and awareness of services. Carers are often told that the information they require is on the internet, but not all carers own or have use of a computer to access it. Carers want some simple help, they want information to be easily accessible, services that have some way of recognising their carer status and help with form filling.

8.7 Some carers have had to give up work in order to fulfil their caring role, some of these carers have reported a loss of income of up to 40%. This can be exacerbated by the conditions of benefits like the carers allowance, which becomes unavailable if the carer gets a job to earn extra money and improve the situation.
8.8 Young Carers were looked at independently as part of the same consultation. There are an estimated 50,000 young carers in the UK\(^5\). The main concerns for young carers is that they feel they are missing out on their childhood and being denied the chance to socialise and become involved in normal activities. The consultation found that young carers want:

8.8.1 More help:
- more respite so they can have a physical and emotional break;
- the chance to take part in activities other young people take for granted; improved access to transport;
- consistency of care, someone the carer can trust to look after their cared for person; and
- access to information about their cared for person’s condition.

8.8.2 More support:
- the chance to meet and socialise with other young carers;
- access to counselling for those who need it;
- better support from schools, ideally dedicated carer support staff;
- better professional support; and
- support for the cared for to socialise with others.

8.8.3 More Understanding of the role they play and the difficulties they face amongst the community, professionals and peers.

8.9 To support Carers (including young people), the Princess Royal trust runs a volunteer support network for carers, aiming to provide support for people who are themselves in a caring role. There are 144 centres across the UK. The nearest support centre to South Staffordshire is found in Walsall\(^6\). However, in South Staffordshire, young carers are supported through Carers Association for South Staffordshire (CASS), which has a dedicated support team for young carers and professionals. Members considered their role in relation to supporting young carers.

8.10 Young carers are supported by running activity groups for children aged between 6 and 18 and the service organises trips during the school holidays to give the children a chance to get away from the pressures at home and to mix with peers who may be in similar situations and can share experiences and issues.

8.11 South Staffordshire Council runs very successful activities for young people across the district. ‘SUSSED’ is a programme designed for young people aged between 5 and 12 years of age and ‘HYPE’ for teenagers aged between 13 and 17.

\(^5\) http://www.carers.org/local/west-midlands/walsall/
\(^6\) http://www.walsallcarers.org/
Activities in the SUSSED programme include rollerskating, trampolining, art workshops, athletics coaching, go-karting and cooking workshops. Activities in the HYPE programme include Breaking, Street Dance, Football, Drama and Fashion activities.

One of the principal issues for young carers is that young people may ‘miss out’ on what could be termed a traditional childhood. By inviting young carers to events, such as ‘SUSSED’ and ‘HYPE’, young carers would get the opportunity to mix with other children and this could aid their social development.

9. National Carers Strategies

A major development in carers services was the introduction of the national carers strategy “Caring for Carers” by the department of health. The strategy recognised the work that carers do and aimed to provide a substantial policy package to aid their wellbeing and support them in their caring role. It was this strategy that suggested the addition of a question about Carers in the 2001 census to attempt to address the lack of information on the number of people providing care across the country.

The new carers strategy “Carers at the Heart of 21st Century Families and Communities” was published on June 10th 2008 and updates and extends the previous 1999 strategy. The strategy sets out the governments commitments over the next three years and beyond, committing £255million to support carers in addition to the £22million previously promised. The commitment for 2008-11 includes:

- £150million towards improving provision of short breaks to Carers.
- Up to £38million to support Carers in balancing their caring responsibilities to enable them to re-enter the job market.
- Over £6million to support young carers in their caring role.

Over the next three years the government are also committing to run a number of pilot schemes to design best practice models for Carers Breaks to provide evidence of their cost effectiveness and to decide what constitutes high quality service provision. They will be looking at how the NHS can better support carers and work more closely with local authorities and the voluntary sector, as well as looking at improving the services offered by GP's. The government is also going to look at ways of providing annual health checks for carers to look after their health and ensure they receive the services they need.

A key part of the new strategy is looking at new ways to empower carers through the provision of training and access to information to help them to deal more effectively with health professionals. As a balance to this training is also proposed for the health professionals themselves to ensure they understand carers and are better able to provide the information and support they require.

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9.5 The government will also be seeking to standardise the definition of carers across the various government agencies and departments as well as gaining more accurate and detailed information on Britain’s carers in order to aid the work of policy makers and service providers.

9.6 In the longer term the aspirations of the strategy are to embed the best practice identified by the pilot schemes into the policy and procedure of the NHS, GP’s, and other local and health authorities enabling carers to access specialist carers services in any community. They also plan to redesign the performance indicator set for the provision of carers services and establish an appropriate set of requirements and legislative system to ensure that carers requirements are met and that their experience of the service is measured. The benefits available for carers are also to be reviewed as part of wider benefit reform and a review of the overall care system.

9.7 There are elements of the strategy focussed on young carers in both the short and longer term, both of which are concerned with protecting carers from inappropriate care, or care which interferes with the young persons education and prevents them from leading a “normal life”. The goal is that all young carers to achieve against all of the “every child matters” outcomes.

10. **South Staffordshire District Context**

10.1 Responsibility for Social Services lies with Staffordshire County Council but the district and borough councils have been involved in services to carers through a number of projects being run by the County Council. The main body focusing on carers is the Carers Programme Board.

10.2 The Multi-Agency Strategy for Carers 2008-2011 is a vision which builds on the work detailed in the 2005-2008 Staffordshire Strategy for Carers. It is a partnership comprising the following organisations:

- Staffordshire County Council
- Staffordshire Social Care and Health Directorate
- Staffordshire Children and Lifelong Learning Directorate
- South Staffordshire Primary Care Trust
- North Staffordshire Primary Care Trust
- Tamworth Borough Council
- Lichfield District Council
- East Staffordshire Borough Council
- South Staffordshire Council
- Cannock Chase District Council
- Stafford Borough Council
- Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
10.3 The strategy contains eight over-arching strategic aims, underpinned by expected outcomes and actions needed to deliver these. The aims of the strategy are:

**Aim 1** – Implement a change programme to become carer focused

**Aim 2** – Implement a multi-agency information strategy for carers

**Aim 3** – Carers are identified and recognised as individuals and receive an assessment of their needs as appropriate

**Aim 4** – Implement a framework for consultation, engagement and feedback so carers can be heard and actively involved in shaping services

**Aim 5** – Carers have more opportunities for time off from caring

**Aim 6** – Carers aren’t isolated and have access to a wide range of services for themselves

**Aim 7** – Carers are supported to optimise their financial circumstances including access to work

**Aim 8** – Carers health needs are met and they have easy access to good quality health services

10.4 The Programme Board’s main body of work is a Staffordshire Multi-Agency Strategy for Carers which aims to achieve improved quality of life for adult and young carers who have caring responsibilities for:

- Older people (65+)
- Adults of working age with mental health needs
- Adults of working age who misuse drugs and alcohol
- Adults of working age with learning disabilities, physical disabilities or sensory impairment
- Adults with HIV/AIDS
- Children with a disability

10.5 The vision is that "all carers in Staffordshire irrespective of age, ethnicity, disability or other diverse needs, will have access to joined up, consistent and appropriate information and support to enable them to sustain their caring role and live their lives as they wish.

10.6 The work of the Programme board has been progressing but has been hampered by the delay in publication of the New Deal for Carers.
10.7 Staffordshire’s strategy has a very broad scope at this stage but it is to be followed by a smart action plan that will be tied in to resources. Part of the strategy includes a proposal for public sector organisations in Staffordshire to be Exemplar Employers with regard to carers and consideration is now being given to how different bodies can be signed up to the scheme.

10.8 The Carers Programme Board are also working on a number of different projects aimed at improving services to carers:

- Commissioning Strategy: This project aims to compare Carers needs with the services offered by current contracts in order to establish gaps in service and commissioning priorities.
- User and carer involvement: which aims to ensure that service users and carers are involved in shaping the strategy of health & social care service provision
- Performance: the objective of which is to contribute to a performance management framework to ensure that improvement in services to carers is properly managed. This project includes a wider performance management role involving partners (i.e. PCT, Carers Organisations)
- Think carer: Aiming to embed consideration of Carers needs in to Staffordshire County Council’s operations. It aims to ensure that carers needs are included in all council policy and procedure and taken into account by all services.

10.9 South Staffordshire Council works closely in partnership with the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) which includes the Carers Association South Staffordshire. There is an LSP Manager jointly funded by the Council and the PCT within the Policy and Partnerships Team who looks after the LSP and the Senior Partnership and Performance Officer has done a lot of work on building links with Carers Charities and improving our services to carers. The council have also managed to secure a Dementia Support Worker for the District for three years, employed by the Carers Association South Staffordshire, funded via the Treasury Invest to Save Scheme with matched-funding from South Staffordshire District Council, the County Council, the PCT and South Staffordshire Housing Association.

11. **Carers Association South Staffordshire**

11.1 The main Carers Charity operating in South Staffordshire is the Carers Association South Staffordshire (CASS). CASS are able to offer support services and outreach work to carers in the district. They cover a wide area of southern Staffordshire including, Stafford Borough, South Staffordshire District, East Staffordshire, Lichfield District, Tamworth and Cannock Chase.

11.2 As a charity CASS does not have a guaranteed funding, it relies on raising money through donations and sponsorship from funding streams such as Local Authorities, NHS, Health Bodies and income from local charitable organisations and individuals.

11.3 CASS provide a number of services to carers in the area including the provision of social support events for carers such as Alzheimer Cafés for
carers looking after someone with dementia. The café offers carers the chance to learn more about dementia and ask questions of experts as well as socialising and talking about their problems with people in similar situations in order to reduce the feeling of isolation. CASS also administers Staffordshire County Council’s Carers Breaks Fund which offers one off payments of around £200 to eligible carers to take some time off from caring.

11.4 Members of the panel welcomed any support for carers, but recognised that a one-off payment was not sufficient in ensuring consistent care and support over a long-term basis. However, Members further recognised the resource implications of providing regular support.

11.5 There is one outreach worker based in each of the 6 districts / boroughs served by CASS who provides support for 20 hours per week. The outreach workers provide support for local carers through telephone calls and home visits, liaising with statutory agencies of behalf of the carer, providing advocacy services and emotional support. They also get involved in local carers groups and represent CASS or the carers in their area at meetings. The main issue around this service is that CASS is only able to provide one outreach worker per district so do not have much capacity for the district’s estimated 3428 Carers who provide 20 or more hours care per week.

11.6 The charity also has a separate capacity for the needs of Young Carers, which deals with the specific issues they face. Problems for young carers include struggling with school work, bullying, stress and limited leisure time. CASS combat this by providing day trips, social opportunities, information and emotional support directly to the young carers and indirectly by offering training and guidance to the professionals that work with Young Carers. The young carers team also work with health professionals to examine ways of improving services, identifying young carers and closing gaps in care provision.

11.7 The challenges faced by CASS and other carer-support organisations is further exacerbated in South Staffordshire, as the rural (and quite often remote) nature of some villages and settlements, means that an organisations such as CASS faces unique challenges in reaching and then identifying voluntary carers.

11.8 In terms of providing support for carers in rural areas, the Council is developing a strong sustainable community led project, supporting the Community for Voluntary Action’s CIRCUIT programme. In this project, there is particular focus around establishing an electronic communication network for isolated carers in Locality 2.

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8http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadTableView.do?a=3&b=2771078&c=WV 8+1PX&d=13be=168&g=485976&i=10012013x1004&n=0&k=0&c=1216823172067&enc=1&dsFamil yId=99, Number of Carers providing 20-49 hours care per week (1211) plus number of carers providing 50+ hours care per week (2217). Number of carers providing more than one hour of care per week is 12,741.
12. **Carers Week**

12.1 ‘Carers Week’ is an annual event held to promote the role and the value of carers in society. The organization estimates that carers save the economy an estimated £87 billion. In 2009, Carers Week is scheduled for the 8th – 15th June 2009.

12.2 Events are held by participating partners to promote the role of carer and to highlight the significant resources (both tangible and non-tangible) required to provide support.

12.3 South Staffordshire Council held an awareness-raising event last year in support of Carers Week, to include publicity and a seminar held at the Council offices. South Staffordshire Council will be participating in Carers Week.

12.4 It is envisaged that the Council will be holding an event on the Thursday in Carers Week, in the Solutions area of the Council. The aim is to celebrate carers and provide information to people who they believe they are a carer. A meeting room is also booked for people who wish to be assessed for benefits and a massage area will be available to assist in relaxation. In the exhibition area of the Council, a DVD will be playing highlighting the important role of carers in the community and CASS will also be in attendance to provide support to carers.

12.5 Across the district, a bus will tour to promote carers. Last year, the bus focussed on the main towns and villages. However, this year, it is anticipated that the bus will visit the more remote areas to ensure that people who may feel isolated by their surroundings have access to information available to people in larger settlements.

12.4 The Carers Week website provides good resources and advice to people who are carers. It is also signposts to other support websites, such as ‘CarersUK’, ‘Crossroads: Caring for Carers’ and other charitable organizations, such as ‘WVRS’ and ‘Macmillan Cancer Support’.

12.5 By signposting in this manner, it is clear that there is a network, not always formalised, of support out there to provide advice and guidance to those that may feel isolated through their circumstances.

13. **Evidence Gathering**

13.1 Members received a presentation from Andrew Leatherland (Partner Liaison Manager) from the Department for Work and Pensions. The presentation outlined the basic eligibility criteria for Carers Allowance and the effects that it can have on other benefits.

13.2 In response to questions the Members were told that the weakness of Carer’s Allowance is that the people who do not recognise themselves as

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9 http://www.carersweek.org/
10 http://www.carersuk.org/Home
11 http://www.crossroads.org.uk/
carers or primarily as carers, may not realise their eligibility for support. The Pension Service prefers to work through other organisations with direct access to people's homes, using District Nurses, Housing Associations, Health Services and the Fire Service to get referrals. These organisations and services have access to people's homes and, while providing their normal service, can identify carers and direct them to the appropriate organisations. The Pension Service currently has a good relationship with the Fire Service, which provides Fire Risk Assessments and is very proactive in reporting where a caring need exists.

13.3 People who are not already in the benefits system can often access services they need through other benefits and services. For example, many people are now being directed towards other benefits through enquiring about Loft Insulation.

13.4 Carers Allowance was last increased in value in April 2008, rising from £48.55 to £50.55 and is not available for people earning over £95 per week. However Disability Living Allowance and Attendance Allowance are not means tested, so a carer may be able to access further support to meet the needs of the person cared for by applying for these benefits. Some people are reluctant to apply because they have been turned down for benefits in the past, but thresholds change and if it has been a while since they last applied they may now be able to access extra money. In some cases benefits for the cared for and carers allowance will not cover all requirements, in these cases people should be encouraged to contact Social Care in order to ensure that they have been properly assessed and are accessing the services available.

13.5 Following the presentation by Mr Leatherland, The view of the panel was that the best way for South Staffordshire Council to help Carers in the area is to promote and support organisations like the Carers Association South Staffordshire and benefit information lines such as the Carers Allowance Information Line run by the Pension Service. Accordingly, recommendations are made in this regard.

13.6 Members further received a presentation from the Local Strategic Partnership regarding the role of the LSP around their role in supporting voluntary carers.

13.9 While Members welcomed the Staffordshire Multi-Agency strategy, they were keen to ensure that the document and the details contained within it were delivered. Members discussed at length what role they could play in ensuring they held those responsible to account for delivering the actions stated.

13.10 It was the view of the Panel that the review should recommend inviting a representative from the carers programme board to the Health Scrutiny Panel to answer questions relating to performance targets. It is recommended this is on a rolling 6-month basis.

14. Conclusions

14.1 Members considered to what extent their role and influence could support voluntary carers, an often hidden tier of care in society. Members were clear that while there was support and strategies in place to deliver targets
in order to aid carers, it was important that these were realistic and delivered.

14.2 Members considered their role in relation to delivery of programmes and strategies and were keen that all strategies were not ‘kept on the shelf’. Members further considered what can be done to support young carers in their social development.

14.3 Members recognised that financial support for carers from Central Government was limited. Sustained payment for their services had resource implications and at a local level the onus was more on the support the Council can provide for those carers and the role in the promotions of available resources, benefits and organisations, particularly given the rural nature of the district, the perceived difficulty of accessibility to benefits and the ageing population.